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THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN IMPERIAL COMMISSION FOR LABOR STATISTICS IN GERMANY.

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Until very recently little attention has been given, in Europe, to the establishment of special bureaus for the collection of labor statistics. In England the Labour Bureau of the Board of Trade dates only from 1886,¹ although special parliamentary and crown commissions have from time to time investigated different phases of the "Labor Question." In Switzerland the Confederated Laborers have since 1887 been allowed a Secretaryship for Laborers, part of the expenses of which are paid from the national treasury. It was only last June that France established her *Office du travail*, and Italy, though discussing the matter, has not to my knowledge taken any final step.

It would, however, be incorrect to conclude that no statistical material was to be had from these countries relating to the condition of the laboring classes, for, on the contrary, much has been furnished by other statistical bureaus. So vitally are the questions which concern the laborer connected with all problems of social organization that this is unavoidable.

¹ *Publications of the American Statistical Association*, June, 1889, p. 277.

The regular census enumerations give us comparisons of the laboring class with the whole population, of trade with trade, and of skilled with unskilled, in point of numerical strength. This of itself is an important piece of labor statistics. The census gives also the size of families, condition as to wedlock, dwellings, etc. The regularly collected statistics of the movement of population is another very valuable source of such information. A still closer approach to the field of labor statistics is made in the statistics of Industries (*Betriebsstatistik*), meaning by industries every place of employment of labor, agricultural or manufacturing, large factory or small shop. This comes nearest to being labor statistics, in the narrower sense, when the characteristics which are made the basis of the inquiry are chosen not with reference to the amount of their product, but with especial reference to the light they may throw on the condition of the laborers employed. For example, the agricultural laborer is quite a different man when employed on a large farm with machinery and a large number of co-laborers than when he "farms it" alone on an acre or two. The cobbler who makes shoes only occasionally as an adjunct to his regular business of repairing is very differently situated from the operator who sews a Goodyear welt by machinery in a large factory. And these distinctions are generally recognized in collecting statistics of industries.

What, then, do we mean by labor statistics? And what is the special field for a Bureau of Labor Statistics? The distinction is not so much one of material as it is one of point of view. It is the social problem viewed from a special standpoint.¹ It is the business of the statistician in this case to ascertain how those persons are situated who live entirely or principally from the wages of their toil. It is, now, a question of classification, of separating the whole population into groups, and putting the laboring class by itself in con-

¹ Cf. v. Inama-Sternegg. *Arbeitsstatistik*. In *Statistische Monatsschrift* (Austrian), Vienna, xviii, 3, March, 1892.

trast to the others. For this purpose we have to investigate wages (form and amount), the quality of the labor, the hours of labor, the standard of living, the operation of factory laws, the mobility of the laborer, etc., and there are questions which demand a more direct and individualistic treatment, case by case, than they could have in any general census or industrial statistic.

And, secondly, it is the statistician's duty here to investigate the effects on society, as a whole, of the conditions thus imposed on the laboring class. We have to consider that class not so much as an important agent in production as an element of the total population, and whose well or ill being will reflect on the whole of society.

While it is clear, then, that the census returns, the statistics of movement of population, of industries, of immigration, of crime and pauperism, and many others, may not improperly be said to be the basis of all labor statistics, yet it is none the less clear that there is a limit beyond which they cannot well go. If, for example, we should attempt to unite some of this work with the census, what would be the result? To be sure, to increase the length of the schedule would entail but little additional expense and labor, so far as collection alone is concerned, but it would militate seriously against the accuracy of the results attained. To approach the individual with more than twelve or fifteen questions arouses opposition and leads to confusion in the replies. Moreover, the work of verifying, collating, and formulating the results of more numerous inquiries is vastly increased, as the number of possible combinations becomes greater.

As the result of considerations similar to the above, and in view of the ever increasing necessity from political considerations, of having reliable and complete statistics of labor, a movement has begun in Europe for the establishment of special bureaus. Some of these are enumerated in opening. No line of investigation in the whole field of sociology strikes more directly at the very tap-roots of the social problems than this investigation of the conditions of labor.

It is very strange that Germany, otherwise always so ready to favor and further a scientific treatment of important questions, should be almost the last to come into line and establish a special bureau for labor statistics, and does so even now in an extremely half-hearted and meagre fashion.

The history of the movement, which now bids fair to bear some fruit in the establishment of an Imperial Labor Commission, may be briefly summarized as follows:¹ In 1868 the Social Democrats proposed, in the Reichstag of the North German Confederation, the establishment of a parliamentary commission, modelled after the English, for the investigation of the situation of the laboring class, and to aid in formulating reforms. In the greater interests of the time, centering in the changes in the constitution, this proposal, although it had apparently met the approval in principle of all political parties, was never acted upon. The question was not brought up in Parliament again until 1885. Meanwhile, since 1878, the reports of the factory inspectors formed a valuable, though by no means sufficient, source of information on labor statistics. In 1885, on the occasion of a revision of the laws regulating industry (*Gewerbeordnung*), the Social Democracy brought forward two conjoined propositions, one for the official collection of wage statistics, and another for the establishment of labor bureaus, which should, besides executing other functions, collect labor statistics. On this no action was ever taken. In May, 1890, the same party brought forward two separate propositions, of a similar nature, and, almost at the same time, Representative Siegle (National Liberal) introduced a bill looking in the same direction. The proposition of the Social Democracy did not reach its first reading until December, 1891. It passed the first reading without much opposition, but the close of the session prevented the second and third readings. Siegle's bill was, however, adopted by the Reichstag in January, 1892. The

¹ Cf. Braun, *Die Errichtung einer Kommission für Arbeiterstatistik*. In *Archiv für Sozial Gesetzgebung und Statistik*. Bd. v. Heft 1.

execution of Siegle's plan,¹ which, though very comprehensive in its general outlines, was not well worked out in the details, was prevented by the creation of a Commission for Labor Statistics, by the Bundesrath. The *Regulativ* for this commission came down to the Reichstag last March, and falls far short of realizing the hopes of those most interested in the establishment of an effective Labor Bureau.

The Commission is, so runs the *Regulativ*, established to assist, by collecting statistical information, in the carrying out of the industrial laws (*Gewerbeordnung*); this relates solely to manufacturing industries, agriculture not being included. It consists of 13 members. The chairman and one other member are appointed by the Chancellor, the latter to be from the official staff of the imperial statistical office (*des k. k. statistischen Amts*). The Bundesrath elects five and the Reichstag six. The appointed members hold office five years, the elected for the life of the Reichstag. The duties of the commission, subject to the instruction of the Chancellor and Bundesrath, are: (1) to consider the advisability of undertaking statistical inquiries, the method of collection, and to formulate the results; (2) to lay before the Chancellor propositions for the above purposes. The Commission has the right to add to its body, in equal numbers, employers and employes, who shall be allowed to speak on the proceedings, and in case the statistics collected need explanation they may call witnesses. Employers and employes must be called when the Bundesrath or the Chancellor demand it. The commissioners are unpaid, but expenses are to be reimbursed, and, in the case of laborers, expenses shall be construed to cover wages lost by loss of time. The Commission can only meet when called by the Chancellor, or by his permission. The Chancellor and each State of the Empire have the right to be heard before the Commission.

Two things at once strike the reader of this *Regulativ*:

¹ Cf. Wörishoffer, *Die Aufgaben der Reichskommission für Arbeiterstatistik*. In Schäffle's *Zeitschrift f. d. gesamte Staatswissenschaft*, xlviii, 3, 1892.

(1) That the Commission is expressly organized for a certain and limited object; the investigations are only to further the carrying out of existing laws. Its work, then, will depend largely on the needs of the government in executing those laws; it can strike out in no independent line. (2) The majority of the commissioners are representatives of the government. The Bundesrath and Chancellor appoint or elect seven members out of the thirteen directly, and if the parties in the Reichstag are fairly represented, from two to three more will be of the government's party. There is then no thought of creating an independent, impartial, scientific bureau. This course is directly in the face of all precedents in other countries. At least, the ostensible intention in the establishment of the twenty-one state labor bureaus, and the national bureau in the United States, has been to make the office independent. The same is true of the other labor bureaus and commissions in Europe, as mentioned above. The parliamentary commissions in England, after which the German commission is apparently modelled, are preëminently impartial. This parallel with the English committees goes farther, in that the Commission can summon employers and employes, and call witnesses. But here the comparison stops, for the proceedings of the English committees are public, and volunteered testimony is gladly heard. The German bureaucratic traditions will allow, of course, of only private sittings.

It must not be forgotten, too, that the commission in which the government has taken such pains to secure a majority, is yet absolutely subject to the control of the Chancellor; can only act by his permission, and even with that permission the limit of its power is reached when it considers the advisability of certain investigations. The *Regulativ* does not define which department of the government is to carry out the investigations when recommended by the Commission and approved by the Chancellor. Presumably, this duty would devolve on the imperial statistical office, an office which, if

we may trust the views of its director, Dr. H. von Scheel, as expressed in the *Allgemeine Zeitung* (Munich), Sept. 18, 1890, is entirely inadequate to cope with so serious a problem.

The usefulness, then, of this new Commission for Labor Statistics will depend entirely on the attitude of the government toward it. It, of course, remains within the power of the Chancellor and Bundesrath to give the Commission such scope and freedom that it can grow to an active, useful body. It is, however, much to be feared that, according to the general run of German politics, the Commission will sink into an obedient, applauding echo of the Chancellor's opinions. It is to be hoped that the interest attaching to the matters which fall to it for consideration will prevent its suffering the fate which overwhelmed the Prussian Central Statistical Commission, a body which, though it had originally much more autonomy than the Labor Commission, has not even met for many years. An extension of the Commission's functions, so as to apply to agricultural labor, is also needed. At present they cover only the laborers affected by the *Gewerbeordnung*. Why the agriculturalists were omitted was not made clear at the time of the adoption of the *Regulativ*.

It is to be hoped that this Commission will be the entering edge of the wedge, and that a more effective bureau may be later established. Certainly, in view of the growing political power of the laboring class in Germany, it would be wise to have their interests disinterestedly studied.

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